



United States Department of Agriculture  
Natural Resources Conservation Service

## **Wildlife Enhancement Activity - Widening of Buffers to Enhance Upland and Aquatic Habitat**

### **Buffers to Enhance Upland and Aquatic Habitat**

The loss of buffers in agricultural landscapes has resulted in the decline of many native wildlife species and increased the degradation of aquatic resources.

#### **Benefits:**

Widening existing conservation buffers (e.g., filter strips, riparian buffers, grassed waterways, field borders) that currently meet NRCS conservation practice standard criteria can provide food and cover for native and game species as well as enhancing aquatic habitat by providing shade, input of wood or carbon to the stream, and stabilizing streambank conditions.

#### **Criteria for Managing the Widening of Buffers:**

The additional buffer width will be at least 30 feet wider than the existing buffer and be composed of at least 5 species of non-noxious, wildlife friendly grasses, perennial forbs, shrubs, and/or trees best suited to site conditions.

- All site preparation and plant establishment shall be accomplished according to the appropriate NRCS conservation practice standard criteria and specifications.
- Forested riparian buffers shall consist of a diversity of tree and shrub species of which the majority are capable of producing fruit or nuts and trees which, when mature, will achieve heights of at least 60 feet and 60% canopy closure.
- Any use of the buffer must not compromise its intended purpose.

#### **Operation and Maintenance:**

- Once established, buffers must not be mowed, disked, grazed, or otherwise disturbed, until after the primary wildlife ground nesting period has ended.
- Buffers will be regularly maintained for its intended purpose through the life of the contract. This includes any removal of vegetation, including grazing. Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect.
- Buffers will have a wildlife management plan to maintain established plant communities through the life of the contract. The wildlife plan will maintain the plant community and its structural diversity, provide habitat for intended species, remove duff, and control woody vegetation.
- Grazing is not permitted unless a grazing management plan is in effect that maintains the buffer's intended purpose.



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